Newsletter of Deccan Birders (formerly Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh)
New Series Volume 16 Number 11 November 2019

INDOOR MEETING: Talk on "Rainwater Harvesting – A Solution to Three Urban Problems" by Ajit Kumar Mahendra. Friday, 1st November 2019, 6.00PM: Goethe-zentrum Hyderabad, 20 Journalist's Colony, Road No. 3, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. (For directions, please contact 94905-09251 or 040-65526443/23350040)

Ajit Kumar Mahendra, our Life Member, retired as Senior Deputy Director General of Geological Survey of India (Southern Region). He was instrumental in conducting a temporal analysis of Hyderabad city after a record rainfall of 24cm in 24 hours in a freak flood in 2000. The results revealed that the flooding had happened because the natural drainage and sewerage lines were all blocked by garbage, while the natural drainage streams, rivulets and tanks into which these emptied were blocked by illegal constructions. This prompted Ajit Kumar to actively take up Rainwater Harvesting and Solid Waste Management since then. Ajit has set up a demonstration unit at which he conducts Lecture-cum-Demonstration sessions. With Telangana state being on the brink of a water crisis, it is imperative that we learn to tap rainwater for storage/usage and for groundwater recharge. Do make it a point to attend this interesting talk.

OUTSTATION TRIP: 2nd-3rd November 2019: Kawal Wildlife Sanctuary. Trip Coordinators: Gowthama Poludasu (Mobile: 9440910967); Srikanth Bhamidipati (Mobile: 9738840070)

Kawal WLS is 250km from Hyderabad and 50km from Mancherial in Adilabad District. It is a dry and dense forest with many Teak and Bamboo trees. Winter is the perfect season to visit this Sanctuary that houses 224 bird species. Seats are limited. Please contact the coordinators to book your seat, as well as for further details regarding the trip.

PELAGIC TRIP: 23rd November 2019: Goa. Trip Coordinators: Umesh Mani (Mobile: 9391227173); Srikanth Bhamidipati (Mobile: 9738840070)

Pelagic birding is very different from forest or waterbody birding, and the absolute number of species is not expected to be high. But since Pelagic species are hardly ever seen on the mainland, these species are likely to be very interesting species. You can also plan to combine a day or two of local birding in Goa (before or after the Pelagic) since migrants would have started to arrive. This is a rare opportunity and seats are limited. Please contact the coordinators to book your seat, as well as for further details regarding the trip.

FIELD TRIP: Sunday, 24th November 2019: Edulabad Lake. Meeting point: NGRI Metro Station, 7.00AM. Trip Coordinator: JVD Moorty (Mobile: 9849470411)

Located near Ghatkesar, Edulabad Lake houses 171 bird species, including many waders. The newly-built pathway gives a great elevation to birders for easy spotting. The gorgeous Red Avadavats and Tri-coloured Munias are among the species that are a treat to the birder's eye. This would be a half-day trip. Carry water, breakfast and rain gear. As always, we will be car-pooling, so please let the coordinator know if you need a ride, and also if you can accommodate any others in your vehicle. Members are requested to wear their Deccan Birders ID cards. Non-members are most welcome; however, they are requested to contribute Rs. 100/- per person to the Deccan Birders kitty. Our new T-Shirts and Caps will be available for sale; T-Shirts are Rs. 450/- each and Caps are Rs. 250/-. Also, as always, please avoid plastic carry bags and containers.

BEYOND SPARROWS, EAGLES AND CRANES
Trip Report – Rollapadu, October 12-13, 2019

Nitish Nagabhairava

The group in action (Photo: Nitish Nagabhairava)

The recent birdwatching trip to Rollapadu Bird Sanctuary was my first real birdwatching trip. Before this I barely knew what "birdwatching "meant.

My friend Surya had recently started this as a hobby, and he eventually got so interested in it that he started studying it seriously and also began doing courses on it. It was he who got me into this too. To be honest, I only went because he dragged me along to keep him company! But I got interested after seeing a variety of birds.

Later, I also got the opportunity to attend an event conducted by the Deccan Birders at Hyderabad, where the keynote speaker was Kalyan Varma, a B.B.C wildlife photographer. His speech about wildlife piqued my interest and I decided to give birdwatching a real try and learn how to spot different kinds of birds.

Common Hawk Cuckoo (Photo: Umesh Mani)

When I went on this trip, I had no idea what to expect and my knowledge about birds was very minimal. For me, all the small birds were sparrows, all birds flying high were eagles and all water birds were cranes! I also came to know about GIBs after Kalyan Sir's speech, and the fact that their importance at the moment is greater than our national bird, the Peacock. But after this trip I came to know a lot about different species of birds and the other members really helped me to spot birds and to differentiate them.

Spotted Owlet (Photo: Umesh Mani)

The first bird I saw was a Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*). I also learnt how to differentiate between a male and a female Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*).

I was fascinated at the way the other birdwatchers were able to spot very small birds and determine their species. I have to admit it was difficult for me to spot the birds amongst the bushes and trees. My favorite moment was getting to witness a Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) preying on a lizard.

Indian Eagle Owl (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Bay-backed Shrike (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Later I saw an Indian Eagle Owl (*Bubo (bubo) bengalensis*), which was the biggest Owl I have ever seen in my life. It felt like I was in a special episode of National Geographic channel spotting different species of birds. We travelled around the whole afternoon, spotting varieties of kites, shrikes and harriers.

In the evening, we travelled in a safari van to watch the Blackbuck which Rollapadu is famous for. The best part of the evening was seeing a male Lesser Florican (*Sypheotides indicus*) jumping to attract the female. It was amazing to see what the male birds do to impress the other gender. I was very happy that I was able to watch this action.

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Lesser Florican displaying (Photos: Umesh Mani)

We were really looking forward to spotting Rain Quails (*Coturnix coromandelica*) but they are really shy birds and difficult to spot in the grass. We only got to hear them.

After a long day which started at 3.00 in the morning and ended at 6.00 in the evening, I thought we would be resting. However, after dinner the group took out their cameras and went in search of Indian Nightjars (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*), Owlets and Owls. They returned at 12.00 midnight!

Indian Nightjar (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Blackbuck locking antlers (Photo: Umesh Mani)

The next day we woke up early, since there is high bird activity in the morning. We had a great view of Blackbuck running as a pack, and the males fighting playfully. We also spotted a male Lesser Florican displaying for the 2nd time.

While travelling back, we discussed the decline in the number of bird species and how the present-day birdwatchers are getting to see only a fraction of the bird species as compared to the senior birdwatchers. It was sad to see how human encroachment has drastically affected the habitat of the GIBs, which are now a critically endangered species. It is shocking to know that there are barely any left in Rollapadu now.

On a positive note, I had a beautiful trip and I would like to thank the trip organizers from the Deccan Birders. If not for them, I wouldn't have got an opportunity like this. It feels good to see that such clubs are providing a means to enjoy nature at its finest without altering it. I am really grateful for this opportunity and I am looking forward to my next birdwatching trip, as a member!

The group in Rollapadu (Photo courtesy: Srikanth Bhamidipati)

The complete list of birds seen during the trip:

Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name
1	Lesser Whistling-duck	Dendrocygna javanica	22	Spotted Owlet	Athene brama
2	Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)	Columba livia	23	Eurasian Hoopoe	Upupa epops
3	Eurasian Collared Dove	Streptopelia decaocto	24	White-throated Kingfisher	Halcyon smyrnensis
4	Spotted Dove	Streptopelia chinensis	25	Pied Kingfisher	Ceryle rudis
5	Laughing Dove	Streptopelia senegalensis	26	Green Bee-eater	Merops orientalis
6	Blue-faced Malkoha	Phaenicophaeus viridirostris	27	Indian Roller	Coracias benghalensis
7	Asian Koel	Eudynamys scolopaceus	28	Brown Shrike	Lanius cristatus
8	Little Swift (Indian House Swift)	Apus affinis	29	Bay-backed Shrike	Lanius vittatus
9	Black-winged Stilt	Himantopus himantopus	30	Long-tailed Shrike	Lanius schach
10	Red-wattled Lapwing	Vanellus indicus	31	Great Grey Shrike	Lanius excubitor
11	Wood Sandpiper	Tringa glareola	32	House Crow	Corvus splendens
12	Asian Openbill	Anastomus oscitans	33	Rufous-tailed Lark	Ammomanes phoenicura
13	Painted Stork	Mycteria leucocephala	34	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark	Eremopterix griseus
14	Spot-billed Pelican	Pelecanus philippensis	35	Plain Prinia	Prinia inornata
15	Little Egret	Egretta garzetta	36	Zitting Cisticola	Cisticola juncidis
16	Cattle Egret	Bubulcus ibis	37	Dusky Crag Martin	Ptyonoprogne concolor
17	Indian Pond Heron	Ardeola grayii	38	Red-rumped Swallow	Cecropis daurica
18	Eurasian Spoonbill	Platalea leucorodia	39	Streak-throated Swallow	Petrochelidon fluvicola
19	Booted Eagle	Hieraaetus pennatus	40	Red-vented Bulbul	Pycnonotus cafer
20	Shikra	Accipiter badius	41	Yellow-eyed Babbler	Chrysomma sinense
21	Rock Eagle Owl (Indian Eagle Owl)	Bubo bengalensis	42	Common Babbler	Turdoides caudata

Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name	Sl. No.	Species Name	Scientific Name
43	Yellow-billed Babbler	Turdoides affinis	68	Common Myna	Acridotheres tristis
44	Brahminy Starling	Sturnia pagodarum	69	Indian Nightjar	Caprimulgus asiaticus
45	Asian Brown Flycatcher	Muscicapa dauurica	70	Red Collared Dove	Streptopelia tranquebarica
46	Indian Robin	Copsychus fulicatus	71	Greater Coucal	Centropus sinensis
47	Pied Bushchat	Saxicola caprata	72	Pied Crested Cuckoo (Jacobin Cuckoo)	Clamator jacobinus
48	Purple-rumped Sunbird	Leptocoma zeylonica	73	Common Cuckoo	Cuculus canorus
49	Purple Sunbird	Cinnyris asiaticus	74	Woolly-necked Stork	Ciconia episcopus
50	Indian Silverbill (White-throated Munia)	Euodice malabarica	75	Oriental Darter	Anhinga melanogaster
51	Scaly-breasted Munia	Lonchura punctulata	76	Red-naped Ibis (Indian Black Ibis)	Pseudibis papillosa
52	Tricolored Munia (Black-headed Munia)	Lonchura malacca	77	Oriental Honey-buzzard	Pernis ptilorhynchus
53	Grey Wagtail	Motacilla cinerea	78	Montagu's Harrier	Circus pygargus
54	White-browed Wagtail	Motacilla maderaspatensis	79	Indian Golden Oriole	Oriolus kundoo
55	Indian Spot-billed Duck	Anas poecilorhyncha	80	Indian Bushlark (Red-winged Bushlark)	Mirafra erythroptera
56	Indian Peafowl	Pavo cristatus	81	Common Tailorbird	Orthotomus sutorius
57	Rain Quail	Coturnix coromandelica	82	Lesser Whitethroat	Sylvia curruca
58	Grey Francolin	Francolinus pondicerianus	83	Red Avadavat	Amandava amandava
59	Little Grebe	Tachybaptus ruficollis	84	Paddyfield Pipit	Anthus rufulus
60	Lesser Florican	Sypheotides indicus	85	Little Ringed Plover	Charadrius dubius
61	White-breasted Waterhen	Amaurornis phoenicurus	86	Grey Heron	Ardea cinerea
62	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	Circus aeruginosus	87	Intermediate Egret	Ardea intermedia
63	Pallid Harrier	Circus macrourus	88	Great Egret	Ardea alba
64	Rose-ringed Parakeet	Psittacula krameri	89	Blue-tailed Bee-eater	Merops philippinus
65	Common Iora	Aegithina tiphia	90	Ashy Prinia	Prinia socialis
66	Oriental Skylark	Alauda gulgula	91	House Sparrow	Passer domesticus
67	Large Grey Babbler	Turdoides malcolmi			

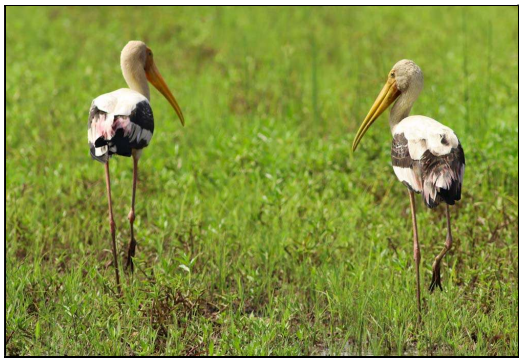
Some other birds photographed during the trip:

Streak-throated Swallows collecting mud for nest-building (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Red-wattled Lapwing (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Plain Prinia with chicks (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Grey Francolin (Photo: Umesh Mani)



Painted Stork juvenile (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Little Ringed Plover (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Eurasian Collared Dove (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Common Emigrant (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Common Babbler (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Indian Silverbill (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Asian Brown Flycatcher
(Photo: Umesh Mani)

Laughing Dove (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Green Bee-eater (Photo: Umesh Mani)

Little Egret (Photo: Umesh Mani)

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KOMODO: BEYOND AND BELOW THE DRAGON'S REACH
DIVING EXPERIENCES Part-2

Text: Amritha Lawrence; Photos: Ashley Weems, NASE AOW Diver

Hawksbill Turtle

There's a different kind of magic that makes people fall in love with diving - be it the first breath you take underwater, or for an adrenaline junkie like me who loves to just jump and fight a current, or for an underwater photographer who loves to show the world this spectacular underwater heaven that's beyond anything you can ever imagine.

With that thought in mind, I boarded the plane to my first international diving trip abroad and I chose to do this around the island of Komodo in Indonesia, famously known for the largest and most dangerous lizards of the world. Beyond the blue waters of Komodo, hides a spectacular life that is something right out of our dreams.

Nurse Shark

Reef Manta

I dived around the main reefs of Komodo through a company called Manta Rei and Blue Marlin. The sites we covered were:

- Siaba Besar (Turtle paradise), Makasa (Manta point), Mauvan (Turtle point) in the middle.
- Batu Bolong, Tatawa Besar, Police Corner and Sebayor in the north east
- Cauldrons, Castle and Crystal Rock in the north (Manta point and Shotgun point for current junkies).

I will try and share a detailed discussion of more dives in the coming articles; this is just a brief overview.

Reef Octopus

The best part about all these sites is not just the abundance of marine life you find there, but also the challenges you encounter. Most of the dives in Indonesia are drift dives, meaning you will be diving in medium to strong currents; Komodo is one place where you will not just enjoy the currents, but also understand how dangerous it can be if you don't have enough experience or a good guide.

What I loved about Komodo was not just the marine life I saw, but also the currents I dived in. The gigantic dive sites make you feel humble about life and also respect the ocean for all its majesty. Komodo taught me to respect and flow with the elements, and I will always carry that in my heart.

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Trip Report – Osman Sagar Lake, August 4, 2019

Text: Arun Kumar; Photos: Umesh Mani

A distant flock of Greater Flamingos at Osman Sagar Lake

I had seen Osman Sagar, aka Gandipet Lake, on Google Maps, and had read a lot about it. It was created by damming the Musi River in 1920, to provide an additional source of drinking water for Hyderabad and to protect the city after the Great Musi Flood of 1908. It was constructed during the reign of the last Nizam of Hyderabad State, Osman Ali Khan, hence the name. It was on the 4th of August 2019 that I actually got to travel right up to the lake and see the avian habitat that it supports. Spread over 46 sq km, it was truly a wondrous sight to behold – an ocean of water in all respects. Surrounding the lake was a carpet of green nourished by wet clay soaked to the brim with water from the lake.

Early in the morning, I met Sudhir, Umesh, Srikanth and Lawrence in Lawrence's 4x4 – the Mahindra Thar, a perfect vehicle for the terrain of Gandipet. In fact, my car got stuck in the mud even before we entered the final trail. That being sorted somehow, we proceeded merrily in the Thar for a wholesome day of birding. There was a light drizzle and a pleasant chill, adding to the ambience of Gandipet.

River Tern

Great Egret and Eurasian Coot

The first sight was one of white and black. Hundreds of River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) and Eurasian Coots (*Fulica atra*) were seen dotting the banks. Among them were Plovers and Lapwings too. Little Ringed (*Charadrius dubius*), Kentish (*Charadrius alexandrinus*) and Sand were the types of Plovers we encountered that day. Egrets in majestic breeding plumage were a sight to behold. While monsoons might be a bit cumbersome in terms of convenience and logistics, I believe it is one of the best times for birding, especially water birds – they all put on their best plumage to attract their mates.

Purple Swamphen

Next up we saw a few Purple Swamphens (*Porphyrio porphyrio*). A Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) posed for interesting photo opportunities.

Pied Kingfisher

Black-winged Stilts roamed around searching for food. Among the bigger birds, we saw the Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*), Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) and Eurasian Spoonbills (*Platalea leucordia*).

Eurasian Spoonbill

After having feasted our eyes and senses, and a lot of photographs later, we turned our attention to the elusive Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*). We crisscrossed the muddy trails looking for the Amur Falcon among the black rocks that dotted the landscape. This falcon is a small raptor of the falcon family. It breeds in Siberia and then migrates all the way to Southern Africa! It would have been nice to catch a glimpse of these falcons, but it seemed fate had reserved it for another day.

We turned our attention to Francolins now. In our hunt for the falcons, we came across Grey Francolins (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) and Painted Francolins (*Francolinus pictus*). These partridges are once again an elusive bunch – they just disappear among the reeds once they are alerted. A lot of patience and walking is needed to get a glimpse. During this Francolin chase, a very interesting bird call excited all of us – a metallic *chrink-chrink*. It was a Rain Quail (*Coturnix coromandelica*) calling for its mate. We went on a 'wild quail chase', driven only by the *chrink-chrink* that punctuated an otherwise calm drizzly morning. Like the Amur Falcon, fate reserved a glimpse of the Rain Quail for another day.

However, in the process, we came across a few more birds – Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks (*Erimopterix griseus*), Oriental Skylarks (*Alauda gulgula*), Paddyfield Pipits (*Anthus rufulus*), Indian Silverbills (*Euodice malabarica*) and Scaly-breasted Munias (*Lonchura punctulata*).

Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (male)

Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (female)

Scaly-breasted Munia

We came across a massive group of Rock Pigeons – 200 to 300 in number. Seeing so many pigeons in their natural habitat was very refreshing. There were interesting variations among them, with a few that looked like Albino and Melanistic. We also came across their close relatives – the Doves – notably the Eurasian Collared Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*) and the Laughing Dove (*Stigmatopelia senegalensis*). Another aquatic species that we encountered was the Lesser Whistling-duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*).

Eurasian Collared Dove

It was a pleasant birding experience at Gandipet. The habitat supports a wide variety of birds – aquatic and otherwise – and one would never go back disappointed. The only concern is the encroachment happening all around the lake. I wish we were wise to learn from past mistakes and visionary enough to save our rich biodiversity for our future generations. Let us sensitize our friends, family and society to be more responsible towards our environment.

Cattle Egret

After a few hours on the banks of the expansive Osman Sagar, one is completely refreshed. The green grass and the blue-grey water were a feast for the eyes. The light drizzle, the fresh air and hundreds of birds – it was an unforgettable experience! Finally, it was time for us to return. A Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) was waiting alongside the route to bid us goodbye.

Black-winged Kite

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Who Am I?

Srikanth Bhamidipati

The October issue of the Pitta carried the concluding part of this series.

Answers to Part-4:

1. Woodpecker
2. (European) Nightjar
3. Bittern
4. Heron
5. Pelican

Members who responded to Part-4: Responses were received from Sreenivas Nalla, who got 4 answers right. Thank you for your participation!

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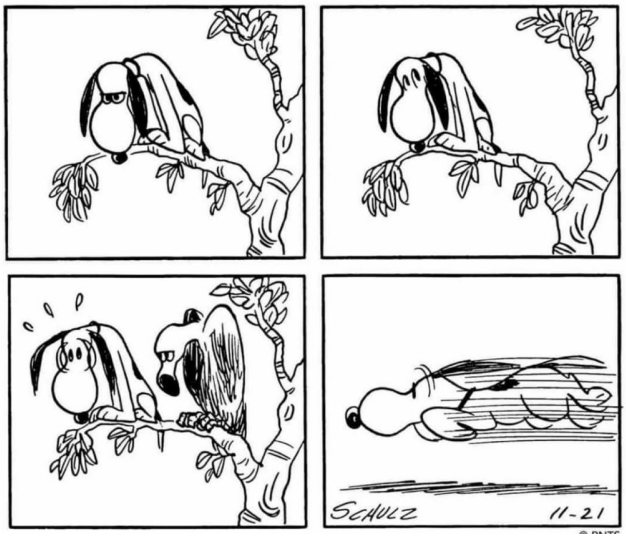
Bird Humour

Contributed by Srikanth Bhamidipati



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Bird of the Month

Text and Photos: Umesh Mani

Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*)

Bar-headed Goose (Gujarat, February 9, 2019)

Order: Anseriformes
Family: Anatidae
Genus: *Anser*
Species: *A. indicus*
Size: 71-76 cm

Description & distribution: The Bar-headed Goose is a stout-bodied grey, brownish and white goose, with a white face and two distinctive broad black bands across the nape or crown, which make it easy to identify. It has a white line down the grey neck, pale steel-grey plumage (paler and more uniform than the Greylag Goose), yellowish or orangeish legs and a black-tipped yellow bill. In flight, it appears greyish with a dark trailing edge to the wing. The sexes are alike, while the juvenile has a white face and dark-grey crown and hind neck.

The Bar-headed Goose is the only true goose native to central southern Asia, including Russia, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and Tibet. It breeds in colonies of up to several thousand near mountain lakes, and winters across North and North-eastern India (with small numbers going down to Central and even South India), Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. Small introduced populations are also present in parts of Europe and North America.

Habitat & behaviour: While the Bar-headed Goose summers in high-altitude lakes, in winter it is usually seen in small to mid-sized flocks, foraging in young gram fields or resting on the banks of lakes or on the sandbars in the middle of rivers or lakes. It is quite crepuscular and nocturnal, and frequents cultivated fields while foraging, feeding mainly on rice, barley and wheat.

It is skittish and difficult to get close to, slowly moving away as one approaches, and taking off when alarmed. Its call is a loud, honking and quite musical *aang aang*, produced in different keys.

The most interesting aspect of its behavior is its ability to undertake grueling migration flights at high altitudes – the Bar-headed Goose is known to be among the highest fliers in the bird world. The challenge of extracting oxygen from the hypoxic air, coupled with the fact that it does not soar or glide, but continuously flaps its wings in flight, makes it one of the most iconic avian migration journeys. Migrating skeins have been recorded at altitudes of almost 28,000ft (approx. 8000m); in fact, George Lowe, the New Zealand-born climber who supported Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay during their ascent of Mt Everest in 1953, said he had seen Bar-headed Geese flying over the top of Mt Everest – which measures nearly 29,000ft!

Nesting: The Bar-headed Goose breeds generally between April and June, in Ladakh and Tibet, the breeding areas closest to us. The nest is a depression in lush green bushes, well-lined with feathers. The usual clutch consists of 3-4 ivory-white eggs.

Local name: The Bar-headed Goose is known as *'Hans', 'Kareyee hans' or 'Raaj hans'* in Hindi, *'Tella pedda batu'* in Telugu, *'Kuriththalayan'* Malayalam, and '*Neer vathu'* or *'Vari kazhutha thara'* in Tamil.

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For Private Circulation Only
Editors: Shanti Mani, Umesh Mani **Email:** bsap.pitta@gmail.com

For information, write to: Deccan Birders, PO Box 45, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad – 500034. **E-group:** http://groups.google.co.in/group/bsap_online. **Website:** www.bsap.in. **Society membership** (in Rs.): Annual: 500 per annum; Student: 200 per annum; Corporate: 2000 per annum; Life: 3000. (*Add Rs 75 for outstation cheques.)*